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THE CASE AGAINST CONSCRIPTION

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The Economics of War

by

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Ex-President, Chambre de Commerce

Canadian Labor and Conscription

by

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THE ECONOMICS OF WAR

Many Canadian businessmen are opposed to conscription for obvious reasons.

First, any man familiar with figures cannot admit — as too often said — that voluntary recruiting has been a failure, when a country of a little over seven million inhabitants has succeeded in raising more than four hundred thousand volunteers for service overseas.

Then, one must take into account, from a business standpoint, the particular position of Canada, which is entirely different from that of all the European countries now at war, and also from that of the United States.

According to statistics drawn up by the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the value of the imports per capita of Canada for the year 1911, compared with that of other countries, was as follows: Canada, \$70.24; Great Britain, \$61.55; Argentine Republic, \$47.39; France, \$39.30; Germany, \$35.17; United States, \$16.63; Austria-Hungary, \$12.61; Russia, \$3.40. These figures show that Canada was proportionately the largest importer in

the world. We have had, therefore, unfavorable balances of trade year after year ever since 1901 and until two years ago, when the balance turned in our favor mainly on account of our consignments of war supplies and foodstuffs to the Allies. As the value of our exports during the war has been abnormal, one can justly fear that, the war over, Canada may be unable to maintain its position in that respect. Nor should one lose sight of the fact that, to compensate for ten years of unfavorable trade balances, Canada has no capital working in foreign lands: quite the contrary, debtor in many countries, Canada is nowhere creditor, and our war debt and other war liabilities are already tremendous.

Canada is not as yet in a position to work its natural resources, for which abundant borrowed capital and considerable immigration are needed. Conscription would curtail both, as capital would not be available should our country prove to be an unsafe investment on account of too large liabilities, and as, very probably, in the future the immigrant will rather settle in a land where there is no compulsory military service, — in some of the States of South America, for instance.

To sum up, I believe — and I take it for granted that such is the belief

of many Canadian businessmen — that Canada has done splendidly under the voluntary system, and that military compulsion would be a grave mistake as it would endanger Canada's economic future. I know that Hon. Mr. Meighen, Solicitor General in the present Government, has said that he would let Canada become bankrupt in order to save the British Empire. You will readily admit that such a proposition cannot be entertained by a businessman; you will admit, moreover, that the bankruptcy of Canada, which very likely would not save the British Empire if it could not be saved otherwise, would surely be the greatest loss to the British Empire in this war.

ADELARD FORTIER.

Montreal, July 5, 1917.

CANADIAN LABOUR AND CONSCRIPTION

The workingmen, throughout Canada, are opposed to the Compulsory Service Bill now under discussion before the House of Commons.

This opposition is not confined to one province, as it has been stated in some newspapers. It is true that opinions have been expressed more freely in the Province of Quebec, but I have had the opportunity of coming in contact with the population of other provinces, and I have found opposition everywhere.

Apart from the constitutional and economic aspects of the question, the average workingman considers that if there is to be conscription of men, it should be accompanied, if not preceded, by conscription of wealth.

The workingmen hate war more than anybody else. War produces individual wealth and prosperity, but in other sections of the community. Unmolested profiteering has rendered ineffective many good recruiting speeches.

In the working classes are also found thousands of good citizens

who have made this country their land of adoption, principally because they wanted to free themselves from the consequences of militarism. These cannot be expected to be very enthusiastic over the introduction of compulsory service.

The workingman of Canada is also aware of the crisis which his country is facing.

Canada has enlisted up to this date an army of over 400,000 men for overseas' service. For the purpose of illustration let us consider for a moment that in proportion to population, this would be equivalent to an army of 6,000,000, if recruited in the United States.

We are told by the best authorities that the Allies must rely on America for food. Are we in a position to meet the demand? We have the land, but we are already short of hands. Our farmers are able to cultivate only part of their farms. Farm help is obtained with great difficulty and only at the price of skilled labor. Overproduction has become an impossibility under present conditions. We cannot even produce sufficiently to keep the cost of living within reasonable figures.

I find from official statistics that in the month of May 1914, the weekly cost of food for a family of 5 was estimated at \$7.42, whilst in the month of May 1917, the same could not be obtained for less than

\$11.82. The general budget of a family of 5 in the month of May 1914 was estimated at \$14.19 per week; in May 1917, it had reached \$18.50.

The situation is alarming and the working classes feel what is coming, and they know who is to suffer first and longest.

For all these reasons, the great majority of workingmen in Canada are opposed to conscription, and from all parts of the country their representative bodies have passed resolutions accordingly.

JOSEPH AINEY,

Montreal, July 5, 1917.